Suggested Principles for Youth Work in NI to Transform Delivery Models

DE Subgroup: Deliver Innovation

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Young People:

Principle: Ensure all young people have access to opportunities that empower them to shape their future.
This principle emphasises the importance of providing diverse and meaningful opportunities for young people to actively participate in shaping the youth work programmes and services they access. This should be accessible to all children and young people. There should also be a particular focus on children and young people whose accessibility is limited due to the conditions and environment they are living with for example, poverty or rurality. Their participation should include, promoting leadership roles, offering volunteer opportunities, personal development, and pathways to employment.

Children and young people must be at the centre of youth services. Youth work organisations must foster a sense of agency and autonomy for children and young people in the places they access and the programmes they undertake, encouraging them to take the initiative and make informed decisions about their lives. The role of adults should depend on their age group and ability.

The voluntary participation of children and young people remains as an essential principle of effective youth work.

Other ideas from survey:

- Do we need to widen what we offer 18-25 years olds something beyond leadership?
- Good leadership of youth services needs to be at the centre of youth services – not sure if this is a programme or a culture.
- Will this bring back a focus on making youth work fun?

Communities:

Principle: Build connections and collaborations within local communities to develop a whole community approach to enhancing youth services.
This principle underscores the importance of community collaboration. It highlights the collaborative nature of a whole-community approach and investing in place-based services for children and young people. It is about building strong, mutually beneficial relationships between youth services and local communities.

Involving all stakeholders to understand needs, determine roles, and prioritise the best delivery agents for critical issues can ensure long-term and sustainable solutions. However, this model must ensure that any provider is a partner that compliments a service without diminishing their unique identity. Youth work must avoid becoming the

The cornerstone of this principle must be a recalibration of local youth services with a clear identification of youth work's role and limitations when working with children and young people. Youth services must interact with other specialist services to select the best agent to deliver services to children and young people.

It is widely recognised that parachuting in services does not lend itself to community collaboration and a continuum of relationships with key providers, but it must also be recognised that youth services should not be viewed as a 'gap filler' for other services that children and young people require where youth work does not have a clear role. This approach fosters a sense of unity and shared responsibility among all community members. We believe working together can create a better future for our young people and communities.

Principle: Prevention and Early Intervention are crucial functions of community youth work. We will address issues before they escalate and support the well-being and development of young people.
This principle ensures the development and implementation of programmes that identify and address potential problems at their earliest stages, reducing the likelihood of more severe issues arising. High quality universal/generic youth services should ensure that it provides protective factors for children and young people that deliver positive outcomes and supports positive transitions into adulthood.

DE should engage with the definitions emerging from the Children's Social Services and Care review to shape how youth work can contribute to these strategies.

This may involve working closely with schools, families, and community organisations to identify at-risk youth and provide them with the necessary support and resources. Again, defining the role of youth work in each area should be considered in light of:

- Schools: is this a narrow focus on qualification and attendance? There is a need to improve how we link with schools to help with that bridge to communities.
- Families: how do we hold a separate role from social services or becoming a childminding service?

- Communities: how to be maintain that our role in safeguarding and supporting young people without out being charged with dealing with ASB is running programmes throughout the year to help provide alternatives to limit escalations.

It will invest in training staff and volunteers to recognise early warning signs and intervene appropriately.

Other ideas from survey:

- Building from within communities needs to be reflected in policy.

People:

Principle: Children and young people deserve the best service possible and those best placed to deliver such services should be supported to do so.
This principle demands that sectoral competitiveness is replaced with a commitment that ensures children and young people receive services from the best provider. To support this principle a set of objective standards that is robust against historical arrangements and traditional delivery models is agreed and implemented across the sector

Organisations wishing to meet this 'best provider principle' should be able to demonstrate that they are viable. Rather than a simple test of financial stability this principle should ensure that organisations can operate effectively and sustainably. It encompasses various factors, such as financial stability, organisational capacity, community support, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. A viable organisation in the youth sector should be one that can successfully deliver its services or fulfil its mission over the long term, while also remaining responsive to the needs of the community it serves.

Principle: Invest in developing a skilled, motivated, and supported workforce to deliver high-quality youth services.
This principle stresses the importance of recruiting, training, and retaining competent, committed staff and volunteers. It involves providing comprehensive induction processes, ongoing professional development opportunities, regular supervision, and performance appraisals.

Organisations should create a supportive work environment that fosters staff well-being, motivation, and career progression. We must recognise that people are leaving the sector due to the short-term nature of the roles and the lack of opportunities to progress in roles. We need a radical shift to reengage people to choose the sector with apprenticeships style pathways to address the reductions over the last number of years.

We should explore the role of absentee rates, staff satisfaction levels, staff turnover, and the community's views on the provision provided. This will help further evidence the changes we need to improve the conditions and prospects for staff within the sector. There is also a need to explore the current professional standards within current youth work contracts across the sector.

Principle: Actively promote and support innovative practices within youth work to improve outcomes and services.
This principle will create a culture that values creativity and innovation by providing safe spaces for experimenting with new ideas. This culture should ensure that there is an offer of regular training sessions and workshops on innovative thinking, design thinking, and creative problem-solving collaboratively across the sector. It should also explore the implementation of a recognition and reward programme for staff and volunteers

who propose and successfully implement innovative solutions that is within the current standard terms and conditions of professional youth work.

This principle will focus on allocating resources for innovation projects, ensuring youth work providers have the tools and support to bring new ideas to life. Historical approaches and delivery mechanisms should not limit it. We need an approach to innovation enabled it to emerge from the front line and not at the centre (mission control over command and control).

Culture and Governance:

Principle: We deliver high standards of governance and accountability to ensure transparent, ethical, and effective management of youth services.
This principle highlights the importance of robust governance structures and practices. Effective governance includes having a clear strategic plan, ensuring transparency in decision-making processes, maintaining ethical standards, and being accountable to stakeholders. It also involves monitoring and evaluating performance and adhering to policies and regulations.

Use data-driven impact assessments to measure the outcomes of existing initiatives, identifying areas where goals are not being met. This is important for value-for-money and should be applied equally across all youth services. Implement change management strategies to support staff and volunteers through transitions, addressing resistance and ensuring buy-in for new approaches.

Principle: Commit to continuous improvement and innovation in delivering youth services to rapidly adapt to changing needs and contexts and generate appreciation from the community.
This principle encourages organisations to continually assess and enhance their practices to remain responsive and relevant. Continuous improvement includes regular feedback from stakeholders, adapting to emerging trends, and implementing best practices to enhance the quality and impact of youth services. This approach should create a culture of working with the community to solve problems rather than presenting solutions that have not received the buy-in of stakeholders.

Principle: Base youth work practices on solid evidence and data to ensure effective and impactful interventions.
This principle uses research, data, and evidence to inform and guide youth work investments. It accepts that local assessments are the best way to understand children's and young people's needs. It involves collecting and analysing data to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes from a short—and long-term perspective. This work happens across youth services and is not limited to only one channel. Future policy should understand that this expertise is available from various sources within the youth sector and limit the need for evidence to emerge or belong to one forum.

Organisations must have robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track outcomes and demonstrate the impact of their work. The report's compilation should account for these systems and not overlay new ones.

Question from survey
How do we ensure that the principles operate within the culture of the sector to ensure that it drives effective organisational behaviours that support the development of the best services for children and young people?